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ABSTRACT

Life insurance executives, university administrators, faculty, and young humanists held a conference to determine how these young humanists might serve business and how business organizations might help alleviate the current crisis in academia. The topics discussed were the following: "The Situation in Academia Today"; "What Has Been Done to Alleviate the Situation?"; "Obstacles to Transition"; "Business Perceptions of Academia"; "The Skills of Ph.D.'s"; "The Needs of Business"; "What Can Young Humanities Ph.D.'s Do?"; "What Can Universities Do?"; and "What Can Business Organizations Do?" From the business standpoint, this corps of people could represent a new source of talent. Whatever steps are taken to resolve these problems, their consequences will be felt by society as a whole. (CFM)

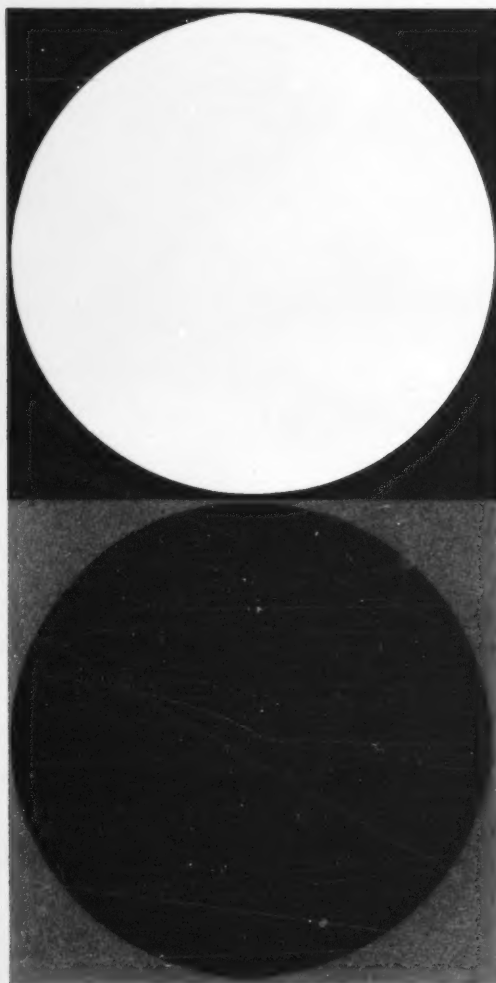
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Princeton Conference 1977/American Council of Life Insurance

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ALTERNATE CAREERS FOR PH.D.'s IN THE HUMANITIES

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Princeton University

Report of a conference of academic leaders and executive officers of life insurance companies at Princeton University March 10-11, 1977 sponsored by the University Advisory Council of the American Council of Life Insurance.

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
The Situation in Academia Today	4
What Has Been Done to Alleviate the Situation?	5
Obstacles to Transition	6
Business Perceptions of Academia	7
Academic Perceptions of Business	7
The Relation of Business and Academia	7
The Skills of Ph.D.'s	8
The Needs of Business	9
What Can Young Humanities Ph.D.'s Do?	11
What Can Universities Do?	11
What Can Business Organizations Do?	12
Conclusion	14

INTRODUCTION

How does business discover, assess and harness talent? What are the career options for Ph.D.'s in the humanities? Is there—somewhere in this group—an untapped reservoir of talent that might be useful to business? These are the questions that brought life insurance executives, university administrators, faculty and young humanists* to a conference on "Alternate Careers for Ph.D.'s in the Humanities," held at Princeton University on March 10-11, 1977.

Executives at the conference agreed that the business community needs bright, talented people with analytical skills and decision-making abilities. George T. Conklin, president of The Guardian Life, declared: "There is a valuable pool of talent within the ivy-covered walls of college campuses."

"What can we expect from Ph.D.'s in the humanities?" asked James Attwood, executive vice president of The Equitable Life Assurance Society. And in the course of his comprehensive analysis, he replied: "They are bright; they handle data, give attention to detail, have ability to conceptualize; they read and write well; they have perseverance and initiative."

At this conference, sponsored by the University Advisory Council of the American Council of Life Insurance, distinguished members of the business and university worlds met to share their insights and chart a future course by which the needs of industry and the skills of humanists might meet in a common future. Their goal, under the chairmanship of Edward D. Sullivan, Avalon Professor of Humanities at Princeton University, was to determine how young humanists with Ph.D. degrees might serve business and how business organizations might help alleviate the current crisis in academia.

The conference marked the most recent of the efforts of the American Council of Life Insurance, through its University Advisory Council, to build a bridge between business and academia. Other recent projects have included a colloquium on student attitudes and their possible implications for business and education, held at Princeton in March 1974; and a conference at Arden House, the Columbia University facility at Harriman, N.Y., June 1976, on the theme of Freedom and Control in a Democratic Society. The Council also sponsors an innovative Business Executive-in-Residence Program which places life insurance executives in a teaching capacity on more than a dozen college campuses each year.

This report should serve as a useful document for all who are concerned with the current crisis of unfulfilled post-academic careers for doctoral graduates in academia, especially for those groups capable of implementing its proposals.

*Those who hold a doctoral degree in History, Literature, the Arts, Philosophy or Foreign Language.

THE SITUATION IN ACADEMIA TODAY

"The world of careers is in a kind of revolution," William K. Paynter, executive vice president of the American Council of Life Insurance, said as he opened the conference. The notion of a lifetime commitment to one career has toppled. And this society-wide revolution is being felt with particular acuity in academia.

Professor Edward D. Sullivan of Princeton University summed up the current crisis: The job market for young, non-tenured people is a "desperate situation that's not going to get better."

Traditionally, over 90 percent of all humanists remained in college teaching. But between now and 1990, an estimated 100,000 Ph.D.'s and near Ph.D.'s will be obliged to seek employment outside the university. Mid-career change, viewed simultaneously as catastrophe and liberation, as impending doom and new promise, has become a fact of life for academics. Their frightening discovery, however, is that few bridges lead out of academia. Everybody knows about the pedestrian trying to cross a busy highway. In desperation, he flags a fellow on the other side, cups his hands and yells across: "Say, how did you get there?" Above the din of traffic comes the answer: "Easy—I was born here." Young humanists, contemplating career change, are not unlike the stranded pedestrian in search of a crosswalk.

Discussions at the conference focused on the short-term face of the problem in an effort to offer some practical advice and some concrete aids to those humanists about to achieve, in Mr. Paynter's tongue-in-cheek words, "non-tenure." But the conference participants were also aware of the long-range implications of this crisis on universities, on business and on society.

One person who is fully aware of this situation in academia today is Dr. Dorothy G. Harrison. As coordinator of the New York State Doctoral Program, she has gathered senior academics from across the country to evaluate New York's graduate education. In connection with this endeavor, she has completed a nationwide study of Ph.D.'s and the job market awaiting them, in collaboration with Professor Ernest May, chairman of the history department at Harvard University. From these vantage points, she brought an unusual expertise and not a few answers to the questions posed at this conference.

As recently as 1970, two-thirds of the assistant professors proposed for tenure were invited to remain in academia for the duration of their careers. Today that ratio is closer to one-fourth. In a 1976 report on "Alternatives for Graduate Education," Dr. Harrison estimated that, even allowing for a radical drop in the supply of humanists, 60,000 young humanities Ph.D.'s will have to find employment outside academia in the next decade. An additional 40,000 will enter the job market before completing their degrees—many presumably ending their formal education at that time.

Against the background of these statistics, the first question of the conferees was "How did we get here?" Clearly, the free enterprise system, based on supply and demand, generates periods of readjustment when demand diminishes (as in engineering 10 years ago) and some form of career recycling occurs.

Why hasn't this mechanism operated to avoid the present surplus? "Are humanists

a different breed of animal—noneconomic and nonresponsive to economic signs?" asked George Maddox of Duke University's Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development.

There are at least two explanations. The first is inherent in the very nature of the educational process. Dr. Hoke L. Smith, vice president of Drake University explained that the process is long and people necessarily make career decisions six to 14 years before obtaining the credentials necessary for their chosen careers. The Ph.D.'s now in surplus began their studies in the 1960s. In this fact lies a second key to understanding the present situation—the high demand of the decade of the 1960s.

Under the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations and throughout the 1960s, it was deemed in the national interest to educate people in the humanities. As Columbia Professor Carl Woodring observed: "At the time of Sputnik, physicists asked the humanists to bring forward their values, whether humane or human, as a help in preventing the annihilation of mankind that physicists believed their science had made possible."^{*}

Universities geared up the machinery for producing Ph.D.'s. The best and brightest students were enticed into academia by National Defense Education Act grants, Fulbright fellowships and the promise of challenging careers. But Camelot has long since vanished. Now, a decade later, with diplomas in hand, teaching experience and even some publications, these people are deemed as surplus in the job market.

It was Dr. Smith's conclusion that "This is not a problem of higher education but a national problem."

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO ALLEVIATE THE SITUATION?

"When you stop selling canned orange juice, you stop making it," a social scientist once pointed out. This kind of retrenchment is occurring in academia. Grants and fellowships have dwindled. Graduate departments in a number of schools are being phased out. But, as Dr. Harrison noted, this is not the solution to the problem. The majority of humanities doctorates are produced by only 10 institutions (Columbia, Harvard, Yale, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, N.Y.U., Illinois, Iowa and the University of Chicago) so that, even if similar programs in all other universities were eliminated, this would not radically diminish the total output. Large universities are, however, taking measures to discourage applicants. Numerous departments of history, philosophy, English and foreign languages address doomsday letters to candidates, warning them of the insuperable odds against success in an academic career.

A manager whose profits were plummeting once summoned his sales people and announced: "We're going to have a sales contest, and the person who wins it keeps his

^{*}Carl Woodring, "Beyond Formalism, Beyond Structuralism: Jobs," *English and Foreign Languages: Employment and the Profession*, ADE/ADFL Bulletins, (September 1976), p.1.

job." Department chairmen find themselves in a similar position today and rarely camouflage the situation. According to Harvard's Professor May, the predictable market response is occurring. Preliminary statistics at Harvard indicate a drop in graduate enrollment in the humanities ranging from 28 percent to 40 percent, depending on the department.

But all these measures are too late to help the presently and imminently unemployed Ph.D.'s—the special group on whom this conference centered.

OBSTACLES TO TRANSITION

A Ph.D. diploma, unlike a degree in law, business or medicine, is an untested commodity in the marketplace, not readily translatable by the business community into useful skills and abilities. "In the abstract," Dorothy Harrison remarked, "it is hard to contest the proposition that if a B.A. in the humanities is an asset in business or government, a Ph.D. should be more of an asset." But as job hunters will testify, the reverse seems to be true. A customer at a local vegetarian restaurant recently asked the difference between the \$3.00 and \$4.00 menus. The waiter's reply: "The \$4.00 lunch doesn't have any spinach." In today's job market, a doctorate appears to be in about as much demand as spinach. The reasons for this seem to fall into three categories: economic, practical, psychological.

1. *Economic.* Business is only just emerging from a massive economic holding action. In a tight market, there is little inclination to take a chance on an atypical candidate to train, when there are specifically prepared applicants available.

2. *Practical.* Creating jobs artificially is counterproductive both for the employee and for the enterprise. Governmental legislation for Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action restricts the hiring freedom of businesses. Bringing in new personnel at a level above current employees poses delicate problems of equity and morale. Mechanisms would have to be created to screen humanities Ph.D.'s and determine who is really suited to business.

3. *Psychological.* While the economic and practical factors are undeniable, the greatest barrier to academics in business is clearly psychological. James Attwood voiced it: "There is undeniably a current of thought that goes: 'My God, the last thing we want around here is a bunch of Ph.D.'s!'"

One of the most urgent priorities of this conference was to examine with business executives and academics the misperceptions of both communities.

BUSINESS PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIA

As an experienced hand at dealing with alumni in business, Princeton Provost Albert Rees is familiar with myths about academics. As keynoter at the conference he named the first academic stereotype as "wild-eyed, impractical people," political radicals—hostile to the free enterprise system, eager to substitute another regime. Incorporated into this is the suspicion that academia is a hippie subculture, antithetic to any mainstream life style.

A second myth is the notion of the "absent-minded professor," which defines Ph.D.'s as incapable of any useful action outside the classroom and in research.

The third myth applies chiefly to non-teaching academics. This "chip-on-the-shoulder" portrait portrays Ph.D.'s as bitter at being unable to pursue a first career choice, entering business as a last resort or, even worse, working outside of a university as a stopgap until the academic scene brightens—unhappy, if not downright ineffectual employees in a corporate setting.

More myths could be added to this list, but Newell Brown, Princeton's Director of Career Services, summed up the overall attitude: "Business is looking for a good track record; that of a Ph.D. is almost antithetic to what business wants. And the longer one perseveres, the more antithetic it looks, for stubbornness is then added to the rest!"

ACADEMIC PERCEPTIONS OF BUSINESS

Businessmen are "concerned about having black ink on the bottom line to the exclusion of everything else," or so academics imagine, says Princeton's Provost Rees. Academics may have little notion of the challenges of the business world, seeing it as anti-intellectual and highly constricted, fundamentally hostile to individuality, creativity and initiative.

"The worst fears that each community has about the other are unfounded," Provost Rees adds, but the only proof is for the two communities to get together, to go beyond the myths toward a realization of common interests and interdependencies.

THE RELATION OF BUSINESS AND ACADEMIA

According to Provost Rees, business and academia are founded on four common tenets not necessarily shared by other elements of American society.

First is the conviction that merit can be assessed and rewarded, that talent, drive and imagination can be discovered, and that organizations do not have to grant promotions on the basis of mechanistic scales or mere seniority. Business and academia reflect

this credo in recruitment and promotion. If colleges abdicated their judgmental function 10 years ago, at the height of the pass/fail era, students and faculty now reaffirm the importance of recognizing achievement. Unlike trade unions and governmental agencies, universities and businesses are "elitist" in the sense that they discriminate on the basis of merit—"the only valid discrimination, but a worthwhile one."

Second, business and academia share the trait of diversity. Each sector embraces a wide variety of viewpoints, backgrounds and skills: businesses in their boards of directors, managers and personnel; colleges in their trustees, administrators, faculty, students and staff.

Third, government regulations are a common burden and link between business and academia. The two communities share common frustrations in the face of similar legislation: building codes, affirmative action, environmental protection, to name just three. While the objectives of these laws are worthy, their administration leaves much to be desired. And both sectors would prefer to achieve the same objectives—safety and fairness—without the paralyzingly slow pace of governmental decision-making.

Fourth, business and academia are deeply committed to innovation. Research on both sides seeks better ways of doing things. One of their joint concerns is to correct a budgetary situation where 95 percent of university research at an institution like Princeton is government funded, with less than five percent subsidized by private enterprise.

Despite their differences, business and academia share these four fundamental beliefs. In an effort to chart the territory of their common interest, Professor Sullivan directed to each community the key questions of the conference. To business: "What do you need?" and to the university: "What do you have?"

THE SKILLS OF PH.D.'S

The credo underlying this conference, and perhaps best expressed by Dr. Harrison, is that within the present pool of humanities Ph.D.'s, there is a cohort that might be useful to business: a one-time segment, attracted to the humanities during the 1960s under very special circumstances; people who were and are performance-oriented, accustomed to looking at complicated questions in a variety of ways, motivated, competitive and bright. Some of these people might be uniquely suited to managerial positions in business.

Considerable discussion centered on the specific skills of humanities Ph.D.'s in a threefold effort to determine what they are, how they can be measured and where they might be profitable in a business organization. This is not new terrain. A special publication "Employment and the Profession," presents the views of some 20 different witnesses.

Kenneth W. Haas, for example, is an English Ph.D. who made a successful career conversion to Director of Management Development at E.J. Korvette. Looking back on his graduate education, he comments:

Even in the most casual of professional English programs, it is doubtful that an individual can successfully survive it and remain unskilled. For the most part, graduates of professional English programs enter the marketplace with skills in reading, writing, teaching, public speaking and analytic research. To assume that the only market in which these skills are traded is the academic betrays the profession, compromises the individual and manifests inappropriate ignorance.*

Ralph Vander Heide, who earned a Ph.D. in German, and is now seeking non-academic employment, suggests the talents he judges typical of young humanists:

- Demonstrated ability in teaching, reading, writing and research.
- Experience in counseling and advising.
- Administrative background (course organization, grading, committee participation).
- Capacity to see problems from different angles.
- Ability to argue logically.
- Familiarity with a product (the subject matter and the students).
- Accountability to students and administration.

THE NEEDS OF BUSINESS

Visualize a prospective employer evaluating an applicant: "Is the applicant willing to deal with the everyday routine? Able to make decisions in the practical realm? At home in micro-decision-making—the chief ingredient to success in the business community?" The scenario is sketched by Mr. Attwood, for whom the success criteria in business are a mixture of five skills in varying proportions for different jobs: (1) Analytical skills—to deal with data and concepts and propose alternatives. (2) Communicative skills—to express the alternatives and their rationale in a way that will influence others. (3) Managerial skills—to achieve a balance of conflicting objectives, maximizing the performance of subordinates in quality, quantity and effectiveness. (4) Human relations qualities—to deal with people, to motivate, inspire and lead. (5) Executive skills—to reach and implement decisions, to divide, allocate, supervise and act.

Commenting on this tableau, R. Morton Darrow, vice president of The Prudential Insurance Company, stressed the evolving needs of business. "The skill package is

*Kenneth W. Haas, "The Value of a Professional English Education," *English and Foreign Languages: Employment and the Profession*, ADE/ADFL Bulletins, (September 1976), pp.61-62.

changing because of outside pressures;" government, consumer groups and a new awareness of democratic and humanistic values. Corporations are becoming increasingly conscious of their social role; they are spending an increasing amount of time and energy on social concerns, social audits and public responsibility. It is Mr. Darrow's conviction that the five skills outlined above will gradually be replaced by new ones, including ability to learn; ability to adjust to changing circumstances; ability to handle uncertainty; grounding in society—the kind of background associated with a learned person; and a sense of how to handle situational ethics.

People with these talents will have a home in corporations, but for the moment there is a lag in hiring. Business does not fully recognize its destination and, in Mr. Darrow's words, "the needs are not the same as the present perception of wants."

Conferees generally agreed that on James Attwood's checklist of essential skills, a humanities doctorate certifies at least two—analytical and communicative—and doesn't preclude the other three. The problem is for academics to translate their skills into a language comprehensible to business. An antique shop in New York City used to have a sign reading "English and French spoken—Cash understood." Its message was clear. Personnel directors have slots to fill that don't specify a doctorate, but that could be filled by bright, motivated, educated people.

In the light of his business experience at E.J. Korvette, Dr. Haas noted:

...there is a constant demand for people who have skill to analyze, to examine, to articulate the impact of life styles, cultural values and the human behavior on business and the organization. The career fields that seek such skills and knowledge are (by order of easiest access): training and development, communications, personnel, public relations, organization development, information systems and consulting.*

The specific roles Ph.D.'s might play in a corporate hierarchy run the gamut from sales, personnel, affirmative action, social policy, corporate strategy and liaison between technicians and managers to "in-house intellectuals." Whatever the task, the quality most frequently mentioned was a capacity to think. As George T. Conklin of Guardian Life Insurance Company declared: "Analytical skills are so rare—any place—that if it can be demonstrated that there is an untapped pool somewhere at reasonable prices, there will be a market."

To match the market demand with suitable candidates clearly requires a comprehensive strategy coordinating the efforts of individual job seekers, universities and business leaders. But within each sector some practical measures might be taken.

*Kenneth W. Haas, "The Value of a Professional English Education," *English and Foreign Languages: Employment and the Profession*, ADE/ADEL Bulletin, (September 1976), p.62.

WHAT CAN YOUNG HUMANITIES PH.D.'S DO?

1. The life insurance executives at this conference reported a common apprehension of a "presently-employed-at-City Hall-but-will-work-if-I-have-to" mentality in young academics. They feared that displaced academics in particular would envisage a career switch as a failure rather than as an opportunity. And they vehemently insisted that Ph.D.'s cope with their personal disappointment and bitterness before entering the job market. To those humanists forced out of academia, Charles Lanigan, vice president of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, offered this assurance: "Try screaming first to vent rage, straightening yourself out, getting your head on straight—and then go in and use your talents. You'll make it unless the disappointment has eroded you." After this catharsis, the other practical steps become possible.

2. Reassess your skills and interests, strengths and weaknesses. Academia, as Ernest May pointed out, tend to define themselves too specifically, according to narrow fields of specialization rather than broader areas of experience and talent.

3. Capitalize on wider areas of education and concern, on transferable skills and useful experience such as debating, college newspapers, Peace Corps, Vista, military service, summer jobs.

4. "Present your abilities in language that the business world can understand," is the advice of Jasper Neel, director of the English program of the Modern Language Association.

5. Prepare a functional resume, reflecting your redefinition, and learn the art of interviews. This is the advice of Career Services Director Newell Brown, who adds: "Business seeks competitiveness: it should know that the university is competitive; business seeks proof that an applicant can deal with bureaucracy: it should know that the university is extremely bureaucratic."

6. Learn auxiliary skills. These, as James Attwood points out, will "give an aura of practicality and exhibit a willingness to deal with routine job-oriented problems."

7. Be attuned to growth areas, such as accounting, computer science, investment analysis.

WHAT CAN UNIVERSITIES DO?

If, as Professor Ronald Tobin of the University of California suggests, some colleges have had "an ostrich attitude toward the problem," it is now time to act. Participants of this conference proposed that universities prepare students and faculty for the lean years:

- Deal openly and honestly with young faculty: spell out the chances for promotion and tenure.
- Endorse the idea that non-academic work is important; that a conversion into business is not a failure.
- Offer administrative tasks to young faculty, providing them experience in this area.
- Offer training to young faculty and students on techniques for successful resumes and interviews.
- Develop orientation programs for displaced Ph.D.'s.
- Create a separate placement service for young faculty members and work actively to place them elsewhere.
- Keep information on Ph.D.'s who have made successful career changes and who might counsel others.
- Seek contacts with the business community through exchange programs, internships, sabbaticals in business, business executive-in-residence programs.
- Encourage businesses to consult the registry of faculty resumes.
- Develop an understanding of the shattering psychological effects of being a surplus Ph.D.

WHAT CAN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS DO?

"Business hires talent rather than diplomas, and in the long run talent will show in performance," James Attwood noted while outlining a variety of practical steps to discover and assimilate a new source of talent. Others joined him in suggesting the following measures which business might take:

1. Experiment on selecting one or more young Ph.D.'s for summer internships. Assign them jobs and at the same time study their potential and their values as a sampling of the pool. Professors and business executives could work together in the process of selecting the interns.
2. Consider hiring Ph.D.'s for one-year post-doctoral or sabbatical appointments to assess the risks and determine in what ways they can be useful in the business hierarchy.
3. Compare the performance of B.A., M.B.A., LL.D. and Ph.D. holders over time.
4. Use all of the above as ways of gaining greater insight into the problem of recruiting, about which much remains to be learned.

5. When recruiting, call upon placement services and registers of faculty resumes at universities.
6. Consult faculty, including junior members, as consultants. Invite them to participate on committees and task forces to broaden perspectives on particular issues.
7. Work with professional associations to find academics with skills appropriate to business.
8. Participate even more actively in exchange programs with universities, such as the Business Executive-in-Residence Program on college campuses, as a means of conveying business priorities to academics, and of assessing the university talent available.
9. Take into account the difference between younger faculty and senior tenured professors, for their backgrounds, interests and daily lives may be widely divergent. Younger staff is heavily involved in management-oriented tasks not unlike those of a business executive.
10. Consider new models. A law degree, for instance, recognized by society as a kind of union card, is not in fact a practical preparation for a specific job. Rather, it certifies analytical skills, discipline, the ability to pursue a task and analyze a problem—skills parallel to a Ph.D.
11. Look at other precedents. Some accounting firms, for example, hire liberal arts students and train them specifically. German business firms place a premium on humanities graduates for their potential cultural contribution to the company.
12. Be sensitive to mid-career changes; give credit for past experience when hiring.
13. Above all, make a commitment to the project of testing Ph.D.'s in business if only on an experimental basis. "A Ph.D. is a minority; we may need some Jackie Robinsons in our organizations to set a good example," asserts Personnel Director Gordon Nelson of Connecticut General. Take the first step.

One possibility is an experimental program being developed by Dorothy Harrison and Ernest May to recruit and screen from within the corps of young humanists the most qualified and appropriate talent for business. In an initial stage, some 40 to 50 applicants would be chosen from participating universities for an intensive three-month course in management. The alumni of this session would then be matched up with cooperating businesses for one-year positions.

The immediate goal of the project is to enable this particular group of Ph.D.'s of the 1960s to contribute their talents in a business setting. "There has been an immense societal investment in these people," declared Lilli Hornig of the Higher Education Resources Center, "that needs to be made to pay off."

CONCLUSION

No one can ignore the long-range implications of today's crisis of career unfulfillment in academia. The measures taken during these last years of the 1970s are destined to have repercussions on the university, on business and on society as a whole. For if in the 1980s humanities graduates play a valid role in the business world, they will have "legitimized graduate study in the humanities as something other than vocational training for college teachers," as one conference participant put it.

From the business standpoint this corps of people could represent a new source of talent. In Dorothy Harrison's words:

Business, government and the world of nonprofit institutions have an almost inexhaustible need for people who can deal humanely and sensitively with other people, who can define options and make prudent and wise choices among them and who, in other ways, can cause complex organizations to move.

Finally, whatever steps are taken to resolve the problems discussed at the conference, their consequences are sure to be felt by society at large. The present crisis, with all its bleak statistics and gloomy portents, can be seen as a good opportunity for renewal, as young, educated, motivated talent emerges from the campus to join with the business community in a host of common endeavors.

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American Council of Life Insurance

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The University Advisory Council consists of a group of distinguished academicians who have helped in many ways to bring the life insurance business closer to the university campus. The result has been a continuing exchange of views between the leadership of the academic world and the private life and health insurance sector.

One of the most effective means of building these ties has been through small conferences on major campus issues affecting both the academic and business communities. The theme of the Princeton meeting, its planning and the invitations to the conference participants were developed with the Council's guidance.

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